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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MA](#)
SUBJECT: MINOR CABINET RESHUFFLE DIMINISHES PM'S ROLE

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[1](#)B. 08 ANTANANARIVO 849
[1](#)C. 09 ANTANANARIVO 09

Classified By: AMBASSADOR NIELS MARQUARDT FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: President Ravalomanana started the new year with a small cabinet reshuffle, announced on January 4, transferring power away from Prime Minister Charles Rabemananjara and towards the presidency. Coming amid political turmoil in the capital (reftel B) and a series of prison breaks around the country (reftel C), the changes have been only one of several issues in a busy media week -- but they represent a notable shift that may indicate waning confidence in the PM. Officially, the reorganization was done to enable the PM to focus on the June-July 2009 African Union summit, and to appease the donor community. In fact, this partially reverses the April 2008 reshuffle (reftel A) when the PM was given the Ministry of Decentralization (in addition to Interior, already in his charge), which he had seen as a mandate to fuse the two ministries' missions. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Former Secretary of State for Internal Security Desire Rasolofomanana has kept his job, but with an enhanced title: he is now Minister of Internal Security, subordinate to the president (he had previously answered to the Prime Minister). His function remains unchanged, and the move is largely administrative.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Gervais Rakotonirina, General Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior since 2005, takes over as Minister of the Interior. He will remain subordinate to the PM, and will spend the coming months focusing on a series of sensitive election issues: repeat elections in overturned mayoral races from 2008, possible first-time elections to replace the 22 regional chiefs (who are currently appointed), and growing calls for reforms to the national electoral system. Rakotonirina is a graduate of Madagascar's Ecole Nationale d'Administration, long time civil servant, and a well-known embassy contact.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Manasse Jean de la Croix Bezara, currently TIM-party senator for Atsinanana Region, will become Minister of Decentralization, and the ministry will move to the presidency (as with the new Ministry of Internal Security). Bezara was president of the committees for judicial issues, territorial administration, defense, and security in the senate, and is a favored member of the president's party. He has already promised more training for regional chiefs, and the creation of a common fund for regional development.

[1](#)5. (C) COMMENT: Although outwardly just an administrative reshuffle, these changes represent a significant shift of

power away from the Prime Minister, and may lend credibility to recent rumors of his imminent replacement and falling-out with Ravelomanana. Indeed, the fact that the changes were announced while Rabemananjara was on vacation in France only intensified these perceptions. Henceforth, the PM will run his government, with no additional portfolio responsibilities. Decentralization has been a key element of the president's development agenda, and the politics of internal security have continually grown in importance over the last year. While the removal of the Ministry of the Interior from the PM's portfolio may presage a willingness to move to the long-awaited election of regional chiefs, it may also serve as an excuse to delay further key reforms such as the creation of an independent electoral commission and a revision of the electoral code (which remains the top demand from the donor community).

MARQUARDT